

HUMAN RESOURCES AND CALIFORNIA AGRICULTURE

A Statement prepared by the
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The Agricultural Workers Organizing Committee is convinced that the farm labor market is more disorganized than any other in the country; that manpower waste in agriculture is wider spread and more acute than in any other sector of the nation's economy; and that the human potentialities of agricultural workers are, under present circumstances, less well realized than those of any other sizeable group within our society.

It should be remembered that the disorganization of the farm labor market affects not only hired farm laborers, of whom there are approximately 2,500,000 in the United States, but working farmers as well. In addition, the lives of the dependents of these persons are stunted by present conditions, bringing the total number of individuals about whom we are here concerned to perhaps 20,000,000.

In this statement, we shall confine our remarks largely to the seasonal farm labor force in California. We do this not only because of limitations of space and time, but because California epitomizes the problems with which we are concerned. This State is in the vanguard of American agricultural labor practices. Alien contract labor programs, for example, were first conceived and initiated in California. At the same time, solutions to the disorganization of the farm labor market have been and are being pressed most vigorously in this state.

A. An Historical Note

Through the last one hundred years, California growers have grown accustomed to having as much labor as they wished, when they wished, for whatever purposes they wished, and under whatever conditions they wished. In these fundamental respects, California agriculture has been unique among the industries of the region and nation. Industry, normally, has to compete for labor. That is to say, other industries have to offer wages, working conditions, and continuity of employment such as to attract and retain American workers. If an industry, such as coal mining, finds it difficult to compete within the larger economy, it has to make technological or other adjustments. This is taken as a matter of course. But not so with California's industrialized agriculture.

California agriculture has historically demanded and received the unparalleled privilege of operating its own controlled labor market, essentially without regard to developments within the larger economy. The die was cast at the beginning of California statehood, when the State's economy was greatly inflated in consequence of the Gold Rush. Prices were high: \$1.00 for an egg; \$25 for a pair of boots. Wages were high, too--except in agriculture. California growers (in major respects, industrialized even in those days) had their crops harvested by Chinese coolies who worked under contract for \$1.50 a day. What is more, growers, then as now, felt no obligation toward their employees before the work began or after it finished. The pattern of operation was described in this way by a writer in Sunset magazine:

The grower looked over his goodly acres, calculated his crop, and went to his Chinese labor boss. "John," he would say, "you find me fifty men. Come Thursday."

The square brown man would consider the question, and say, "All lite (sic), I get 'em."... and there you were. Thursday next, fifty replicas of John would appear with mess kit and such bedding as they needed. They lived in the fields, worked as the locusts, cleared the crop and melted away.

Truly, the more things change, the more they are the same. Throughout a series of waves of immigration, the basic characteristics of the California farm labor market have remained unchanged. Growers have encouraged the immigration of Japanese, Hindus, Filipinos, Arabs, American dust bowl refugees, Mexican "wetbacks," and Mexican contract workers (braceros). In each case, the purpose and result of these migrations has been to keep the farm labor reservoir full to overflowing. In each case, the imported group has been poverty-stricken, disadvantaged, inarticulate, and undefended. In each case the century-old tradition has been maintained: California agriculture has been able to remain uncompetitive with other industries.

For the purposes of this conference, the most noteworthy result of California's farm labor traditions has been, and is, a nearly total indifference to considerations of manpower utilization and waste.

B. Types of Crops

In their cropping practices, California growers have never had to be concerned with normal problems of labor supply and utilization. They have chosen to plant those crops which tended to yield maximum profit, which have been, for the most part, those requiring a large amount of hand labor. The unique qualities of California's farm labor market probably account for this State's pre-eminence in "intensive agriculture" more than climate, more than land, more than any other factor.

It is no coincidence that California leads the nation in the production of sugar beets, lemons, walnuts, almonds, apricots, avocados, figs, grapes, olives, peaches, pears, plums, prunes, dates, artichokes, asparagus, cantaloupes, carrots, cauliflower, celery, garlic, lettuce, honeydew melons, lima beans, strawberries, spinach and tomatoes.

For practical purposes, California is the country's sole commercial producer of garlic, artichokes, prunes, plums, olives, dates, figs, apricots, almonds, walnuts, lemons, and several other important crops. This is not because these products cannot be grown in other areas. In large measure, it is because other areas have not been able to command the limitless labor reservoir traditionally at the disposal of California growers.¹

The crops in which California specializes are, almost without exception, crops requiring a great amount of hand labor. Including preparation of the crop and harvesting operations, following are the labor requirements of representative "intensive" crops.

Table 1

Crop	County	Year	Man-weeks per acre	Man-weeks per ton
1. Carrots	Imperial	1956-7	8.3	0.52
2. Peaches	Stanislaus	1957	5.5	0.44
3. Lettuce	Monterey	1958	2.8	0.34
4. Tomatoes	San Joaquin	1958	2.8	0.16
5. Apricots	Santa Clara	1958	2.7	1.0
6. Pears	Santa Clara	1958	2.14	0.20
7. Grapes	Fresno	1957	2.04	0.27
8. Asparagus	San Joaquin	1958	1.9	1.4
9. Valencia Oranges	Orange	1957	1.6	0.17
10. Irish Potatoes	Kern	1958	1.2	0.94
11. Sugar beets	Yolo	1957	1.0	0.04
12. Cotton	Fresno	1958	0.9	1.7

Source: State of California, Department of Employment, unpublished data. (DE882 forms, adapted)

The above data may be compared with the labor requirements of representative "extensive" crops.

Table 2

Crop	County	Year	Man-weeks per acre	Man-weeks per ton
1. Rice	Butte	1950	0.08	0.04
2. Beans, dry	Santa Barbara	1950	0.07	0.13
3. Grain, small	Kings	1950	0.02	0.015

SOURCE: State of California, Department of Employment. Labor Requirements for California Crops. Sacramento, Calif., 1953, pp. 33 and 35

1. Interestingly enough, California agriculture has perpetuated its privileged position through the claim that it was disadvantaged and unable to compete with other areas!

C. Area Concentration

The climate throughout most of California is hot and dry throughout a long season running from April to late October. Winters are relatively mild, with moderate rainfall. The coastal areas tend to be somewhat moister and cooler, Southern California somewhat drier and warmer. Generally speaking, however, nature provides no obstacles to the growing of the same crops over a tremendous area. Crops which are grown successfully in a Northern California county, such as Glenn, Butte, or Colusa, could be grown successfully in Kern County, or even farther to the South. Despite the possibility for geographical diversification inherent in California's beneficent climate, pronounced patterns of regional concentrations of certain crops have emerged. The following table suggests the extent of this tendency as of 1955. There is no reason to believe the tendency has been reversed since that time.

Table 3

Crop	Major Producing Counties	Percent of State Total
1. Dates	Imperial, Riverside	100
2. Figs	Fresno, Merced	92
3. Garlic	San Benito, Santa Clara, Monterey	92
4. Flaxseed	Imperial	88
5. Artichokes	Monterey, San Mateo, San Joaquin	87
6. Cherries	San Joaquin, Santa Clara	86
7. Apples	Somona, Santa Clara	84
8. Oranges	Tulare, Orange, Ventura, San Bernardino, Riverside	84
9. Plums	Fresno, Tulare, Placer, Kern	80
10. Cotton	Kern, Fresno	80
11. Peaches	Stanislaus, Sutter, Merced, Fresno, Tulare	78
12. Lemons	Ventura, Santa Barbara, Los Angeles, San Diego	78
13. Asparagus	San Joaquin	77
14. Lima Beans	Ventura, Stanislaus, Santa Clara	76
15. Avocados	San Diego	75
16. Olives	Tulare, Butte, Tehams,	74
17. Lottuce	Monterey, Imperial	74
18. Watermelons	Riverside, Imperial, Merced, Stanislaus	
19. Grapefruit	Riverside, San Bernardino	73
20. Cantaloupe	Fresno, Imperial	72
21. Grapes	Fresno, Tulare, San Joaquin	68
22. Carrots	Monterey, Imperial	67
23. Honeydew melons	Riverside, Stanislaus, Yolo	65
24. Field corn	Kern, San Joaquin	63
25. Apricots	Santa Clara, San Benito, Contra Costa	52
26. Prunes	Santa Clara	51
27. Snap beans	Santa Clara, San Diego	49
28. Potatoes	Kern	46

SOURCE: C.O. McCorkle, A Statistical Picture of California's Agriculture, California Agricultural Extension Service, Circular 459, April 1957 pp. 54-56 (adapted)

Admittedly, dates could not be grown successfully in Monterey County, and artichokes could not be grown successfully in Riverside County. Most California crops, however, could be much more diversified geographically than they are at the present time. This would perhaps result in a slight decrease of efficiency in hauling and processing operations. At the same time, though, it would result in considerably greater efficiency in the utilization of the preharvest and harvest labor force.

D. Seasonality.

The tendency toward concentration in one or a few cash crops produces tremendous variations in each region's labor requirements throughout the year. In 1950, the most recent year for which these data are available, the high and low seasonal labor needs of major agricultural counties were as follows:

Table 4

County	High		Low	
	Week Ending	Man Weeks required	Week ending	Man-weeks required
1. Alameda	Feb. 25	270	July 22	4,320
2. Butte	Feb. 18 - March 25	0	Nov. 18	3,600
3. Contra Costa	March 11	190	Sept. 30	4,790
4. Fresno	April 8	440	Sept. 16	32,100
5. Imperial	Sept 9	10	May 27	8,650
6. Kern	March 18	580	Nov 11	20,210
7. Kings	March 18 - April 1	0	Nov. 11	13,100
8. Lake	April 8 - July 29 and Nov 11-Dec 2	0	Aug. 12	1,500
9. Mendocino	Nov. 4 - 25	0	Aug. 26	3,500
10. Merced	March 18	0	Sept. 9	6,790
11. Monterey	Feb. 11	850	July 22	6,450
12. Orange	Dec. 16	350	Aug. 26	5,400
13. Sacramento	March 11	310	Sept. 2	3,900
14. San Benito	March 11	240	July 22	4,800
15. San Bernardino	Nov. 18	340	Oct. 14	5,000
16. San Joaquin	March 18	2,280	Oct. 7	18,430
17. San Luis Obispo	Dec. 30	260	Sept. 23	1,540
18. Santa Clara	April 8	830	Aug. 19	21,780
19. Santa Cruz	March 18	220	Oct. 7	4,270
20. Solano	March 25	240	July 8	3,220
21. Sonoma	Nov. 11	230	Sept. 2	9,300
22. Stanislaus	April 8	100	Sept. 2	9,660
23. Sutter	March 18	30	Sept. 2	7,770
24. Tulare	March 25	1,550	Nov. 4	20,980
25. Yolo	March 11	500	Sept. 16	7,290
26. Yuba	June 17	40	Aug. 26	2,050

SOURCE: State of California, Department of Employment, Labor Requirements for California Crops. Sacramento, Calif., June, 1953, pp 7-18, passim.

Aside from the height of the labor peaks, and depth of the labor troughs, the most striking thing about these data is the variation from county to county of the timing of the peaks and troughs. Nearly every week, from July through November, a different county comes into its period of greatest labor demand.

Under existing arrangements, there are only two ways in which these demands can be met. One is through migrancy. The other is through the temporary employment of local workers. Let us examine each of these alternatives.

E. Migrancy

The AWOC rejects categorically the rationalizations of growers who claim "Mexican-Americans" have wanderlust in their souls, and the like. A survey recently conducted among migrants by the Oregon Bureau of Labor revealed that the overwhelming majority were migrants because they could not survive any other way. The human costs of such an enforced state of impermanence are beyond calculation, and among other costs must be reckoned the damage this condition works upon the collective conscience of our civilization.

Whether one is concerned with manpower waste, or with damage to the human spirit, the consequences of migrancy must be viewed as regrettable. For example, a child who is enrolled in ten or twelve different schools, in half a dozen different states during the school year, is obviously not receiving standard education. In the most "advanced" school districts along the migrant route, these children may be taught how to make furniture out of orange boxes, and the virtues of drinking orange juice if the family were able to afford orange juice. In less advanced school districts, migrant children are simply ignored, until, in time, they move on. Only in very rare cases--and in these cases, only by dint of extraordinary persistence and personal gifts--can a migrant child prepare himself for a life other than the performance of unskilled labor. By and large, the abilities latent in this sizeable population group are forever lost to the society-at-large.

Even in the narrowest manpower terms, migrancy must be counted a social blight. Apologists for the system would have us believe that as soon as a migrant family leaves one crop area, it finds work in another, and is in this way able to work as much of the year as its members desire. Such an image is a grotesque distortion of the truth. Everyone who has examined conditions as they actually are, agrees that the hardest-working migrants are burdened by extended periods in which they are travelling, looking for work, or unable to work due to inclement weather, sickness, or some other reason. The Oregon survey already referred to found that most informants in a sample of 826 migrant farm workers had had no farm employment at all during the previous winter season (26 weeks). Those who had had employment, had worked only a little over a third of the time, on the average.

In a study of migratory farm workers in the Atlantic Coast migrant stream, William Metzler found that employment during the preceding 12 months averaged 182 days -- almost exactly half the time. It should be remembered that the "annual worker plan" of the U.S. Employment Service is more highly developed on the Atlantic Coast than in the Central States or on the Pacific Coast, and it is quite probable that the workers in Metzler's sample were relatively better off than the average migrant nationally.

Metzler found that on more than two-thirds of the days when his informants had not worked, they were available for work. 47% of the man days were lost due to "slack season," 14% due to bad weather, and 7% due to crop failure.

Although no nationwide survey of migrants has ever been made, it seems reasonable to assume that the average migratory farm worker is able to find the equivalent of not more than 175 full days of employment during the year. The average non-agricultural worker works 267 days during the year. This represents a loss of 92 days per migrant per year. We must make further assumptions as to the number of migrants, in the absence of any official or even semi-official data. Estimates of migratory farm laborers range from 750,000 to 1,500,000. If the true number is in the vicinity of 1,000,000, the man days lost in this segment of our economy total nearly 100,000,000.

F. Non-migratory Farm Workers Seasonally Employed

Migrants have received so much attention from popular writers, from religious groups such as the Migrant Ministry, and from voluntary organizations such as the California Committee on Families Who Move with the Crops, that we may sometimes lose sight of the fact that migrants actually make up a relatively small proportion of the farm labor force in this State. In 1957, for example, the average number of interstate migrants on California farms was 9,700, in an average farm labor force of 463,200. The average number of intrastate migrants was 22,500. Interstate and intrastate migrants together constituted only 7% of the average farm labor force throughout the year. Migrants play a somewhat more important role during seasonal peaks, but the largest number of migrants employed in California at any one time in 1957 was 60,300 in the middle of September. This was only 10.7% of the total labor force of 565,000 at that time.

Most seasonal farm labor in California is performed by local workers. The year-round average of these workers in 1957 was 99,100, or 21% of the total force. In the September peak, the number rose to 132,700, or 23.5% of the total.

One of the most serious gaps in our present information about the farm labor market lies in the fact that we know almost nothing about the constituency of the temporary non-migratory group. Some of the "locals" are students and housewives who have no intention of trying to make a living as farm workers, but are merely supplementing their income with a few days or weeks of harvest earnings. A few of the locals are perhaps wage-earners from other industries who choose to work in the fields during their vacations.

In terms of manpower waste, these types of seasonal workers are of interest to us in a different way than the migrant group we discussed above. We cannot count their off-farm days as "loss", since they spend these periods productively. We are justified, however, in counting their on-farm days as "half-lost," since these vacation-time farm workers are likely to be casual in every sense of that word. They do not have to have their farm earnings to survive, and hence the piece rate system of payment which acts as a lash on the backs of bona fide farm workers lays more lightly on the backs of the students and housewives. Even assuming a vacation-time worker were putting forth a maximum of effort, it is seriously to be doubted that he could come close to the productivity of the professional farm worker. Despite a great many false statements to the contrary, most farm labor is skilled labor. It takes some years to become a truly proficient gatherer of cotton, peaches, or almost any other crop. In this sense, the use of amateur farm workers may properly be considered manpower waste.

It is unlikely, however, that in any major crop area in California, amateurs comprise more than a small fraction of the seasonal farm labor force. The bulk of the State's seasonal farm labor is performed by braceros (whom we shall discuss in a moment) and by local workers who are employed seriously, albeit temporarily, in farm work. This latter group deserves our most careful attention, because it is commonly overlooked amid the exposés of conditions among migrants and Mexican Nationals, and yet, in some ways, it has the most serious problems of all.

Many of these local professional farm workers, seasonally employed, are former migrants who have made a large enough "stake" to settle down, however precariously, at the fringes of agricultural communities such as Stockton, Firebaugh, and Visalia. Many others are refugees from the poverty, racism, or both, which obtain in the Deep South and Border States. The farm labor lexicon needs to be enriched to the extent of an appropriate term for this particular element within the farm labor force. For want of a better term, let us here call them "shoestringers," after the phrase "shoestring communities" by which their places of residence are often known.

For our present purposes, "shoestringers", are marked by two distinguishing characteristics: they attempt to make a living entirely or largely from agricultural labor; they wish, if possible, to make this living from a single base of operations. That is to say, they have no desire to return to a state of migrancy from which so many of them have only recently escaped.

These characteristics of the "shoestringers" are of the very greatest interest to us, in view of what we have already observed about crop patterns in California agriculture. We have seen that labor demands in each area tend to fluctuate violently from season to season. Let us consider the case of San Joaquin County, in which seasonal variations are great, but not nearly so great as they are in a number of other counties.

It is estimated that about 20,000 hired farm laborers reside in San Joaquin County. Perhaps half of them have year-around employment, as dairy and poultry workers, as farm mechanics and handymen, and so forth. The remainder must try to make a livelihood in casual farm employment. During much of the year, many of them are necessarily unemployed, as the following table of seasonal labor demands clearly indicates.

Table 5

Midmonth Seasonal Labor Requirements, San Joaquin County,
1958

Month	Labor Requirements (man-weeks)
January	6,000
February	5,800
March	6,500
April	6,300
May	16,000
June	12,600
July	7,200
August	8,600
September	25,200
October	23,600
November	6,500
December	5,200

SOURCE: California State Department of Employment, unpublished data.

During the July "slump", apricot and plum picking are virtually the only harvest activities in San Joaquin County. Both are minor crops in with asparagus, grapes, cherries, or tomatoes. During the long winter "slack season", from November to March, the only significant harvest is celery. It would seem that San Joaquin County's cropping practices might well be more diversified. Bush berries and cantaloupes, for example, both of which have heavy labor needs in July, could be grown successfully in San Joaquin County. Broccoli and cauliflower, both of which have heavy labor needs in the winter, could also be grown. It is probably chimerical to suggest that seasonal variation might be removed from agricultural labor demands in any single county. It is interesting, nonetheless, to note in passing that if San Joaquin County's seasonal farm labor requirements during the year (roughly 550,000 man-weeks) were distributed evenly, ^{virtually} all seasonal labor could be performed by the 10,000 local residents who are available for this type of work. Similarly, in the State as a whole, 7,574,434 man-weeks of seasonal labor were required in 1958: an average of about 145,000 man-weeks, if spread evenly throughout the 52 weeks of the year. During the week ending October 18, 1958, there were 135,960 local temporary workers employed, a figure which presumably included few school children. In other words, California has nearly enough residents to fill her seasonal farm labor needs, even under the present depressed condition of farm wages, if seasonal demand curves are smoothed out by staggered plantings, crop diversification and the like.

In the absence of such developments, the reservoir of potential resident workers is unemployed much of the time. Or more accurately, underemployed. The peculiar labor practices of agriculture permit available work to be "spread around" almost without limit. It makes little difference to the farmer with 25 acres of apricots whether 10 men or 50 men pick his fruit. Under the piece-rate system, his labor costs are exactly the same in both cases. In fact, there are at work within the farm labor market powerful influences toward the employment of more workers than are objectively needed. Most farmers turn over their harvesting operations to labor contractors. The temptation is very great for these contractors to use labor inefficiently. They customarily receive from the grower a fixed profit per box or crate, and, in addition, they are permitted whatever they are able to pry from workers, for services rendered. The more workers in their crew, the more they are able to realize from the sale of sandwiches, cold drinks, cigarettes, and so forth.

During any of the several "slack seasons" during the year, one of which San Joaquin farm workers are experiencing as these lines are written, it is commonplace to see trucks and busses full of workers returning from the fields early in the afternoon. This means that some workers who might be getting full employment, are partially employed, while others who might be unemployed, are also partially employed. There is a levelling effect--at the level of underemployment. Many "shoestringers" find this sort of half-time or third-time employment more than they can endure, in which case they go on relief (which should be of interest to community taxpayers), go to work as "jack-leg" carpenters or other types of workers (which should be of interest to labor unions), or drift into alcoholism, idleness, and emotional disorders (which should be of interest to our entire society).

In summary, the "shoestringer" tends to average even less employment, and an even more pitiful annual income, than the migratory farm worker. In 1954, Varden Fuller and associates interviewed 251 farm laborers in Santa Clara County and found that migrants averaged 168 days of employment per year, while residents averaged 144 days of employment. Secretary of Labor James Mitchell recently reported that the average worker whose principal employment is agricultural (most of whom, we have seen, are residents rather than migrants) had 144 days of employment in 1957, and \$892 in income.

The manpower waste to the nation, not to mention the human tragedy, implicit in these skeletal statistics is too obvious to require elaboration.

G. Day-Haul Programs

The United States Employment Service, and the California Farm Placement Service, take a great deal of pride in what they call their "day haul programs." These programs are arrangements whereby contractors transport seasonal farm laborers from urban collection points to rural areas where there is a "labor shortage". In theory, the day-haul concept seems reasonably attractive. It extends the perimeter within which a farm laborer can economically work, and hence presumably reduces the extent of underemployment among "shoestringers". In practice, however, the day-haul system merits our most critical scrutiny.

In the first place, the government agencies which sponsor such arrangements exercise no control whatever over the practices of the labor contractors who transport and supervise the workers. Thus, contractors who operate out of Oakland during the cotton-picking season, charge their workers \$1.50 a day for transportation, 25¢ a day for the use of a sack, and \$1.00 a day for lunch. Soft drinks are 15¢, and charges for other incidentals are proportional. The minimum cost to the worker for the contractor's services is \$2.75 a day. According to the Farm Placement Service's own figures, the average worker picks 250 pounds of cotton a day, at \$3.00 a hundredweight. The average worker's net earnings are therefore \$4.75 a day, or about 50¢ an hour.

This is not the most disturbing feature of the day-haul system, however. Under this system, workers must leave as early as 2:30 a.m., and return as late as 9:00 or 9:30 p.m. (It is over 150 miles from Oakland to the cotton fields of Fresno County: about a four hour trip, unless the contractor drives at unsafe speeds, which is another common weakness of the system.) Their pay, portal to portal, averages about 25¢ an hour, and under the day-haul system, of course, ordinary family life, or any sort of normal life, is impossible.

These characteristics serve to cancel out whatever theoretical merits the day-haul programs may have. Few men who return from a hard day's work at nine o'clock in the evening are going to be ready to go out to another hard day's work at two-thirty the next morning. Indeed, the likelihood is that after trying the day-haul program once or twice, a man will give it up entirely, since even a "shoestring" is apt to value his time at more than 25¢ an hour. Far from introducing stability into the farm labor market, the day-haul system serves to compound chaos. The turnover within this system is tremendous, and the persons to whom the system appeals are largely denizens of "skid rows" in Los Angeles, Sacramento, Stockton, Fresno, and Oakland.

The day-haul reflects no credit on agricultural employers, contractors, or the government agencies involved. Far from being a solution to the problem of manpower waste in agriculture, it is a conspicuous example of inefficiency and disorganization operating in the guise of planning.

H. Child Labor.

According to the California Farm Placement Service, 30,000 children and youths were employed in agriculture in the week ending September 7, 1957. Only 6,600 of these were family workers, the remaining 23,400 being employed for wages. In a number of California counties, such as Santa Clara and Sonoma, the opening of school is delayed at the pleasure of growers, in order that children may continue to work in the crops. No data are available on the number of children who continue to work during the school year, in violation of Child Labor laws. In 1958, the Wage and Hour and Public Contracts Divisions of the U.S. Department of Labor found 4,491 children working during school hours on 1,944 farms in 39 different states. Nearly half were under twelve years of age. It is common knowledge that the grievously understaffed compliance divisions of the Department of Labor are able barely to scratch the surface. According to the National Child Labor Committee, "for the last few years, Department of Labor inspectors have found children illegally

working on about 60% of the farms inspected." There are 14,000 industrial farms in California alone!

We can note only in passing that child labor, whether "legal" (outside school hours) or "illegal" (during school hours), is generally regarded by civilized countries as vicious and immoral. Our own society came to this conclusion half a century ago--except for agriculture. California growers last year testified en masse before the State Industrial Welfare Commission that child labor in agriculture is good for the industry, good for families, good for the child himself. The prune growers of the Santa Clara Valley, for example, might do well to visit the tents and hovels of the children who are "learning the virtues that made this country great." Thirty-five years ago, Arthur Gleason described what these growers might see even today:

In the prune country, a friend of mine went into the shack of the Meronda family at eight o'clock in the evening. The twelve-year-old boy was in bed asleep. His hands were moving ceaselessly in sleep, traveling across the sheet and picking at it. "What is the matter?" asked my friend. And the boy's mother answered: "He does that sometimes when he's asleep. He thinks he is picking prunes."

For the purposes of this conference, the economic consequences of child labor in agriculture are of particular interest. The Secretary-Treasurer of the National Agricultural Workers Union, Dr. Ernesto Galarza, put the matter in perspective during his testimony before the Roosevelt Subcommittee when in 1957 it conducted hearings concerning the extension of the Fair Labor Standards Act to agriculture.

Mr. ROOSEVELT..... You would recommend, then, against the formula in various related bills that try to divide the corporate farm on the basis of man hours?

Mr. GALARZA. That is a very difficult thing to work, Mr. Chairman. Take, for instance, in picking of orchard crops years ago, even today, what families can find work will go into a field with four or five kids--of course we are opposed to that system of labor; we think it is exploitation in the highest degree, but nevertheless it happens. How are you going to determine the man-hours spent by the 6 year old kid? Obviously he is not putting in 8 man-hours. He is putting in 8 baby-hours.

The child puts in child-hours in the same manner that alcoholics put in alcoholic-hours, the mentally deficient put in deficient-hours, and irresponsibles put in irresponsible-hours. The use of child labor in agriculture is but one of many ways in which inefficiency is created and perpetuated in the farm labor market. The piece-rate system of payment is the prop which makes such anachronisms possible.

I. Foreign Contract Labor

In an earlier section of this paper, we remarked that Southwestern growers have historically enjoyed special privileges in regard to labor supply. From 1885 to 1951, the Nation's immigration laws specifically prohibited the importation of alien contract labor. Southwestern agriculture has systematically ignored this law, in its recruiting and importation of Japanese, Hindu, and other classes of foreign workers mentioned earlier. The preferential treatment of Southwestern growers reached its apex -- or nadir -- when the U.S. Government itself went into the business of recruiting, transporting, and contracting foreign workers on behalf of growers. The Government has remained in this curious business ever since.

For all practical purposes, when we speak here of foreign contract laborers, we are speaking of braceros. California employs no British West Indians or Puerto Ricans. About 1,000 Japanese Nationals and 25 citizens of the Philippine Islands are employed in California, but these numbers are dwarfed by the dimensions which the Mexican National program has assumed. During the World War II farm labor "crisis," 36,600 foreign contract workers, at the most, were employed in California. On September 30, 1958, 93,650 braceros were at work in this State.

We must pass over many interesting and important aspects of the Mexican National program in the present discussion. In terms of manpower utilization, the bracero program includes both merits and demerits, which we can treat here only in the most cursory outline form.

1. The bracero contracts are virtually unique in American agriculture in that they include a guarantee of employment during a period ranging between four weeks and six months, and they include a form of "unemployment insurance." To be sure, these guarantees are minimal, and there are times when they appear to be honored more in the breach than the observance, but it is safe to say that taken by and large, Mexican Nationals enjoy more employment security than any significant body of American farm workers has ever enjoyed. This raises the following question: if it is possible for growers to band together in "labor users" associations, and through these associations provide bracero employment at least three-fourths of the time, why cannot they offer employment guarantees to American farm laborers?

2. The weight of evidence demonstrates irrefutably that the bracero program deteriorates labor standards in agriculture. Labor unions have pointed out for many years that the program was specifically designed for this, and by its very nature could not possibly have any other effect. Recently, the Secretary of Labor himself, who administers the bracero program, publicly admitted the same thing, in so many words:

"....foreign labor programs in themselves often permit employers to evade the necessity to pay the wages and to do the many other things needed to attract and retain domestic farm workers. Where this happens it clearly affects adversely the working conditions, pay standards and the job opportunities of our own workers. This is no secret."

To the extent that the bracero program adversely affects the domestic farm labor market, it may be said to affect manpower use and misuse. For example, it is a matter of record that out-migration of domestic farm workers from the Imperial and Lower Rio Grande Valleys has been directly proportional to the importation of braceros. American workers who once worked steadily as irrigators, cattle feeders, and general farm laborers in these year-around growing areas, are now in the same position as the other migrants we discussed in an earlier section. It is probable that their working days have been cut by at least one-third in direct consequence of the bracero program. At least 50,000 domestic farm workers in the valleys mentioned are thus affected.

The bracero program also affects domestics who, rather than choosing migrancy, choose to remain in the area into which braceros are imported. The United Packinghouse Workers of America, and National Agricultural Workers Union have on file scores, if not hundreds, of affidavits from domestic farm workers who have sought jobs only to be told, "We're using Mexican Nationals this year." Although this is a direct violation of the law, its frequency cannot be doubted. The result is further to aggravate the already serious underemployment of "shoestringers."

The following experience will serve to illustrate the above points. On July 10, 1959, several representatives of the Agricultural Workers Organizing Committee met at the corner of Commerce and Market Streets in Stockton, at 4:00 a.m., to observe the operation of the "shape-up" and "day-haul" which are conducted at that location by the farm labor contractors of the area, with the assistance of the Farm Placement Service. Several busloads of apricot pickers went out, and a few carrot and onion toppers. When this skid-row labor market closed, shortly after dawn, there were scores of men looking for work who had not been taken on by any of the contractors.

The July 4, 1959, weekly report of the Farm Placement Service included the following information for San Joaquin County: "Beans, dry: want 50 by mid-July. Celery (pull-plant): labor shortage. Want 100 by July 13. Potatoes (harvest): labor shortage. Want 500 by July 13." Elsewhere in this same weekly report, was the information that over 100 Mexican National that moment employed in San Joaquin County in each of the following crop activities: celery, pull-plant; potatoes, harvest; asparagus, weed-hoe; onions, pull; apricots, pick; sugar beets, thin-hoe; tomatoes, thin-hoe; and miscellaneous vegetables, plant-cultivate-harvest. Smaller numbers of Mexican Nationals were also employed in strawberry picking, fruit thinning, and potato cultivating.

Not the slightest indication was given by labor contractors or Farm Placement Service representatives on the morning of July 10 that there was any "labor shortage" in beans, potatoes, or celery. Not the slightest indication was given that Mexican Nationals were at that moment employed in large numbers in a wide variety of San Joaquin County crops. As a result, over 100 American citizens drifted away with the dawn, under the assumption that there was no work available that day. This palpable manpower waste must be attributed to the agencies administering the bracero program. These agencies put the burden upon the American farm laborer to find where braceros may happen to be working; to return to the Farm Placement office and request an identical or similar job; to return to the ranch with an identification card; if he is refused employment, as he often is, to return once more to the Farm Placement office to file a

complaint. In order to prevent being displaced by a bracero--that is, in order to serve as his own compliance officer-- a "shoestring" must have his own automobile, he must be able to pay for several gallons of gasoline, and he must be prepared to spend the better part of a working day traveling back and forth between town and ranch. It is obvious on the face of it that "shoestringers" usually cannot meet these conditions and hence are unable to exercise the rights which are theoretically theirs.

3. The bracero program exercises a detrimental effect on the general economy in areas where braceros are used in large numbers. The wages which are paid domestic farm laborers are customarily put almost immediately into circulation, since they are usually barely enough to buy groceries, gasoline, clothing, and other urgent necessities. The wages of the Mexican National do not, for the most part, work any benefit upon the local economy. A University of California researcher found, upon interviewing some hundreds of braceros, that the average gross pay of Mexican Nationals in this State is approximately \$33.00 per week. \$1.00 of this is checked off for health insurance and goes to Pan-American Underwriters, in Los Angeles. \$12.25 is checked off for board, and goes to a caterer, often a large-scale out-of-area operator, such as the Stewart-Hill Corporation, or Narod Properties, Inc. After these compulsory deductions, the bracero's net pay averages between \$19 and \$20 per week in California. Of this amount, he spends an average of between \$4.00 and \$5.00 in this country. Not even this small amount can be considered a contribution to the local economy, since it includes the cost of sending money orders to Mexico, "gratuities" for services rendered by mayordomos, and other expenses peculiar to the Mexican National program.

As a result, bracero-dominated areas, such as the Imperial Valley, are withering at the roots economically. Small and medium-size businesses are closing, and the businessmen and their former employees are thrown upon the general labor market, to catch on as best they can. Needless to say, this process entails a good deal of milling and drifting--i.e., manpower loss--and, in addition, it constitutes a real threat to the job standards of workers in other industries and other areas.

4. While this conference is perhaps concerned primarily with manpower waste in the United States, it seems appropriate to comment upon the consequences of the bracero program for Mexico, not only on humanitarian grounds, but on the grounds that in our era, national economies are growing increasingly interdependent.

In the short run, braceros are able to find steadier employment and better wages in this country than in their native land. The chronic poverty of rural Mexico is, of course, one of the inner dynamics of the entire system. But contracts are frequently only six weeks in length. The average bracero stays in the United States only 3.1 months. The \$14 per week which he sends home, or carries back with him, is only enough to support his family, with perhaps a few dollars left over. The average bracero's participation in the contract system does not equip him to better himself by buying land, fertilizer, livestock, seed, or equipment. Indeed, in a real sense, he is often worse off than before. While he has been in the United States, his land has dried up and gone to weeds, if he is lucky enough to own land in the first place. If he does not own land, he has probably lost the job contacts and

opportunities previously open to him. For the average bracero who has returned to Mexico, the future holds only one viable alternative: to come back to the United States under another contract. The University of California study mentioned earlier found, in a sample of 334 braceros, that 93.4% intended to seek another contract -- including many who had encountered serious exploitation and abuse under previous contracts!

We shall not comment upon the effects of this system on the family, church, and other social institutions in Mexico. For our present purposes, it is sufficient to observe that only a very fortunate and unusually affluent bracero is able to obtain a contract when he wishes. The average bracero who returns, let us say, to the State of Jalisco late in October, following the tomato harvest in San Joaquin County, will probably not be able to get another contract until the California strawberry crop begins to come in the following spring. He may well have to wait until the rush for tomato pickers begins again the next September. During his sojourn in Mexico -- and a sojourn is all that he considers it -- the average bracero may work at an occasional odd job. But for the most part, he is unemployed and unproductive. Taking the larger view, this is one of the inescapable and unfortunate consequences of the bracero program as it is presently constituted: during all but the seasons of peak demand in the United States, a legion of displaced persons is adrift in Mexico; creating unimaginable problems of local relief and social disarray; unwilling to take employment even if employment is available, for fear of missing the call for contract workers. Apologists for the bracero program like to point out that it channels from \$30,000,000 to \$50,000,000 annually into the Mexican economy. This is in truth the shortest-range sort of palliative. In the long run, the bracero program is wasting Mexico's manpower even more profligately than it is wasting the United States'. So long as the bracero program endures, the deep-lying economic problems of Mexico will remain insoluble -- among other reasons, because the program enables those in charge of Mexico's destinies to postpone even a beginning on the hard planning and discipline which ultimate solutions will require.

J. Conclusions and Recommendations

The Agricultural Workers Organizing Committee rejects the doctrine that agriculture is intrinsically different in kind from other industries, that it must enjoy preferential treatment and unique privileges in its labor practices, and that the farm labor market need continue to be overflowing, disorganized, and inefficiently used. This Committee believes that existing farm labor practices are part of an institutional pattern of disorganization which, more than anything else, is strangling American agriculture and transforming it into shapes neither labor, government, society-at-large, nor growers themselves desire. The only remedy for disorganization is organization, and to this end, we offer the following recommendations.

1. Growers themselves need more effective organizations in order to bargain effectively with the canneries, packers, wholesalers, and chain stores which are their principal customers. If growers were to devote a portion of the time and money they are spending on the bracero program and on anti-labor campaigns, they would soon be in a position to demand and receive from major purchasers of agricultural commodities a return sufficient to elevate farm labor conditions to an American level.

2. Farm wages should be increased substantially, and working conditions in agriculture should be made as comparable as possible to those of other industries. These steps will solve the "labor shortages" which have been the justification for the existence of foreign contract labor programs.

3. The bracero program and other foreign labor arrangements should be eliminated as quickly as feasible, and depressed economic conditions in Mexico, Japan, Puerto Rico, and the British West Indies attacked in rational and humanitarian ways.

4. The exclusion of the agricultural industry from social legislation affecting every other major industry should be removed, although at the outset it may prove necessary to retain some distinctions between unemployment insurance and overtime pay provisions in agriculture and those in other industries.

5. Labor contractors, day-haul programs, and pre-dawn shape-ups should be replaced by hiring halls such as those which operate in longshoring, construction, and other types of seasonal and casual employment.

6. The Farm Placement Service, as it now operates, is out of place in agriculture, as it would be in any other American industry. This would be true even if the Service were to undergo a radical change and begin to function on behalf of employees rather than employers. It is not the proper place of a government agency to influence the conduct of labor-management relations in either direction. If the Farm Placement Service is retained at all, it should be limited to data-gathering.

7. One or a combination of groups -- e.g., growers' organizations, workers' organizations, Vocational Rehabilitation Bureaus, Agricultural Extension Service -- should initiate programs whereby specific workers are trained for specific agricultural jobs. To expect an individual to be proficient at pruning, thinning, cultivating, irrigating, tractor-driving, spraying, and harvesting, is equivalent to expecting him to be a journeyman carpenter, plumber, mason, painter, and electrician simultaneously.

8. The seasonality of farm labor requirements should be reduced through greater crop diversification, and through staggered plantings. Under present cropping practices, a "flash deal" such as green peas lasts only two or three weeks. There is no botanical or meteorological reason why the pea season could not be extended to twice this length ^{of time} or more. At the present time, growers are fearful that if they plant their crop later than their neighbors, they will miss the good prices which the early crop presumably brings. In practice, the flood of peas coming to fruition depresses the price after the first few days. The question of who should plant earlier and who should plant later is, of course, one for growers to decide among themselves, through the sorts of organizations recommended in Point #1.

9. Research concerning mechanization of hand tasks should be increased. Information about technological advances should be disseminated, and adoption of the advanced techniques and equipment should be encouraged.

10. We of the Agricultural Workers' Organizing Committee are under no illusions that the above recommendations will be acted upon merely because they are logically and morally sound. Much the same recommendations have been

advanced by government bodies and citizens' groups repeatedly over the past fifty years or more. It is apparent that the organization of the farm labor market, and of the larger institution within which it functions, will come about only as the power centers which currently dominate that market and that institution are challenged by countervailing power centers. It is fitting that this countervailing influence should consist in agricultural laborers organized on their own behalf. Indeed, this is more than fitting -- the stabilization of the farm labor market will come about in no other way. It cannot be imposed from outside, either by some other arm of the labor movement, or by an agency of government.

This, then, is the keystone in the architecture of our conclusions and recommendations: agricultural workers must be organized into units appropriate for the purpose of bargaining collectively with agricultural employers. The labor union is the only means we know which accomplishes this effectively and at the same time in consonance with democratic principles.

Although we place this recommendation last on our list, in all likelihood it will have to come first chronologically. Wages and working conditions will not improve greatly until farm laborers are organized. There will be no hiring halls without a union. Political reforms are unlikely until farm workers are registered and voting -- one of the side-benefits of organization. It is doubtful that growers will take the organizational steps necessary to save their own situation until they are virtually forced to do so through the fact of worker organization.

We do not hesitate to say that gross manpower waste in agriculture will continue until the labor movement penetrates this, the last major unorganized industry in the country. What is more, we do not hesitate to say that the elimination of manpower waste, and the other fruits which unionization will bring to agriculture, will prove the salvation this sick industry has been seeking vainly in price supports and other preferential legislation.

We of the Agricultural Workers Organizing Committee are convinced that within the foreseeable future, the agriculture of California and the nation can and will become something in which we may all take pride, rather than a badge of shame we must wear before the watching world. We of the Agricultural Workers Organizing Committee are led by the vision of a farm labor force which works productively and well, under equitable conditions, in the determination of which the workers themselves have had a just voice.

Toward these ends, all our labors are bent.

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